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Breaking Down the BARRIERS

Alberta Transportation **June 2003**



"Access to Travel" Web site

The federal government has launched a web site called "Access To Travel", which provides information on accessible transportation services and travel, programs, and policies across Canada. The site aims to make accessible travel easy and enjoyable.

The site has been developed and will be updated by Transport Canada, in partnership with the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) and the provinces and territories. The "Access to Travel" web site was modeled, in part, after Alberta's Inter-Community Public Transportation Guide, found at **www.trans.gov.ab.ca** and clicking on the international mobility symbol. As one of the initial partners, Alberta Transportation provided contact information about accessible carriers in the province. The "Access to Travel" web site now contains accessible transportation information on almost all the provinces.

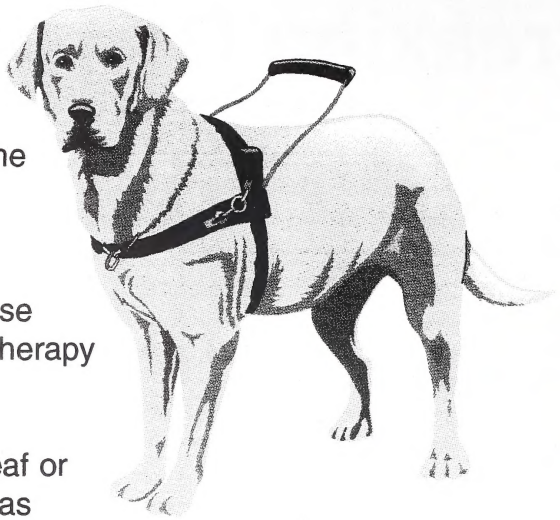
Additionally, a new feature was added to the site that allows accessible transportation providers to submit contact information directly to an agent of the site. The transportation provider will then be contacted to provide additional information. Alberta Transportation encourages all accessible transportation providers in Alberta to supply their information to the site.

"Access to Travel" can be found at **www.accesstotravel.gc.ca**

For more information, please contact:

Greg Scott
Transport Canada
Phone: (613) 990-2251
E-mail: scottg@tc.gc.ca

Assistive Animals



Assistive animals, usually dogs, are becoming increasingly common around the world. Guide dogs for people with visual disabilities have been around for many years. Recently, however, dogs with new types of skills have been introduced. These include hearing dogs, service dogs, and therapy dogs.

Hearing ear dogs alert people who are deaf or hard of hearing to everyday sounds such as smoke alarms, crying babies, doorbells, telephones, and alarm clocks, and lead their owners to the source. Hearing dogs can be identified by their orange collars and leashes.

Service dogs, also called special skills dogs, assist people with disabilities to perform a variety of common tasks and emergency care. They are trained to operate light switches, open and close doors, assist a person in rolling over in bed, retrieve items, help a person dress, push elevator buttons, carry parcels, and pull wheelchairs, among other tasks. Service dogs serving people with physiological disabilities, like epilepsy or autism, can activate alert systems, such as LifeLine, and make sure the person remains in a safe environment. Service dogs usually wear small backpacks.

A new type of assistive dog is the therapy dog. They are placed in long term care facilities to provide companionship to the residents and assist professional caregivers.



Currently, only guide dogs are regulated and there is no certification process for training schools. However, Assistive Dogs International is an organization that establishes and promotes standards of dog acquisition, training, and partnership. Many training schools choose to follow their standards.

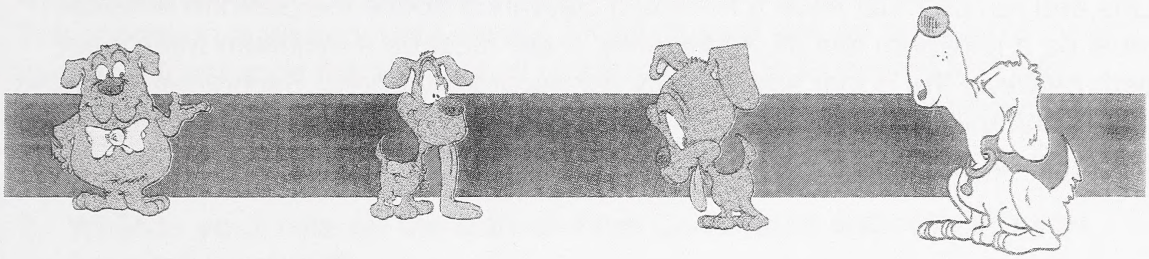
The raising and training of an assistive dog usually requires 12 to 24 months. Dogs enter the program at a very young age, and dogs that don't have the proper



temperament (friendly, calm, and energetic) do not graduate. After the program, the dogs are paired with their owners and undergo further training. Most companies continue to "tune up" the dogs throughout their service lives and they usually retire at age ten. The pair receives an ID card, which must be carried at all times.

It costs anywhere from $4,000 to $15,000 to breed and train a dog. Most companies cover these costs through financial donations and only charge the person a small application fee. Canadian companies providing assistive dog training include Pacific Assistance Dogs Society, Prairie Assistance Dogs Inc., Dog Guides Canada, Western Guide Dogs of Canada, and the National Service Dog Training Centre.

Through education and experience, people may become more aware of the various types of assistance dogs and that there will be fewer examples of transportation providers refusing to carry assistive dogs. Under the Blind Persons Rights Act, transportation providers are required to accommodate assistive dogs. A transportation provider may only refuse to carry an assistive dog where the operator has a documented allergy to the animal. The amount of training for the dogs and owners ensures they will not cause problems for transportation providers and their passengers in any situation.



Did You Know?

In December 2002, accessible taxi service returned to Calgary. These taxis are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at the normal taxi meter rates. Currently, Associated Cabs operates seven accessible taxis in Calgary. To arrange for an accessible taxi trip, call Associated Cabs at (403) 299-1111.

New CSA Standards D435 and D436



The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) has finalized the new CSA Standards D435 (accessible transit buses) and D436 (accessible over-the-road buses). The standards provide requirements specific to vehicles used by transit and over-the-road bus operators in routine services. The standards also set forth the minimum features necessary to minimize the risk of occupant injury during the boarding, transportation, and disembarking phases of a trip taken on an accessible bus.

Both standards are intended for buses with Gross Vehicle Weight Ratings (GVWRs) greater than 7,000 kilograms. The standards are very similar, except that D436 has slightly higher ultimate strength ratings, as over-the-road buses travel at higher speeds than transit buses and the occupants are subject to greater forces in the event of a collision. Additionally, D436 requires that all passengers travel in the forward facing position, while D435 states that passengers can be either forward or rearward facing.

The standards require minimum open spaces for passengers with mobility aids. Lifts and ramps must have a minimum clearance above the platform and lifts must be a minimum length. Additionally, there must be a minimum width clear path between the doors and mobility aid securement area. Securement devices and occupant restraint systems should not compromise a person's dignity when being used.

For more information, including obtaining a copy of the new CSA standards, please contact:

Canadian Standards Association
Suite 100, 5060 Spectrum Way
Mississauga, ON L4W 5N6
Phone: 1-800-463-6727
Web site: www.csa.ca

PROFILE

Member of the Advisory Committee on Barrier Free Transportation



Hugh English

Manager of Transit
City of Medicine Hat

1. How did you become interested in transportation issues?

My direct interest and involvement in transportation issues started with my role as Manager of Transit for the City of Medicine Hat. The City is responsible for the operation of both a regular public transit system and a special transit service, which provides accessible transportation to people with disabilities. Transportation is an important service for all citizens and an accessible system can greatly enhance the ability of all residents to be independent and fully participate within the community. The City of Medicine Hat is committed to having a fully accessible transit service in 2004.

2. What is your role on the Barrier Free Committee and why did you become involved?

I represent the views of a mid-sized transit property operating both a regular route service and a pre-booked special transit (handi-bus) service for persons with disabilities. Participation on the Barrier Free Committee provides a valuable forum in which to share information about transportation issues with other members and influence policy development to benefit Albertans. The diversity of the committee helps broaden one's perspective and brings forward important issues. Accessibility extends beyond the needs for a vehicle and includes curb cuts, building codes and planning. Input from those most affected must be heard.

3. What are the major concerns or issues you have related to accessible transportation?

Accessible public transportation is a very important issue. Although there is much more to be done, we must recognize that significant increases have been made to the numbers of accessible buses in public transit. The demand for accessible transportation will continue to grow each year as our population ages and people want to remain active and independent. Integration of an accessible public transit service is improving transportation opportunities. However, the increasing demand for accessible service, financial constraints and the lack of accessible transportation (including taxis) in many communities will continue to be concerns. The Barrier Free Committee creates an excellent forum for the exchange of information on these important concerns.



Use of Designated Parking Spaces

This past winter, a group of four Honours Psychology students from the University of Alberta conducted a study on parking placard use at several locations within the City of Edmonton. They observed four parking lots with designated spaces: two convenience stores, one drugstore, and one supermarket, between 4 and 7 p.m.

The group counted the number of people who used placards properly, appeared to use the placards improperly, and parked without a placard. The students found 59 percent of people in designated stalls were parked properly, while 36 percent of people used the stalls without a placard and five percent appeared to have no need for the placard. The convenience stores had a higher rate of abuse than the other stores, as people would run into the store for a very quick stop after parking illegally in a designated stall.

On November 1, 2001, Alberta Transportation and Alberta Government Services implemented the new Parking Placards for Persons with Disabilities Policy. The policy was developed by stakeholders to ensure people with the greatest needs have access to designated stalls.

For more information about the new policy, please visit www.trans.gov.ab.ca and click on the international mobility symbol.



The fifth annual Edmonton Transit System (ETS) Community Conference was held on May 10, 2003 at Grant MacEwan College. The event provided an opportunity for consumers, community stakeholders, and other interested parties to receive an update on ETS and DATS initiatives, and provide suggestions on how to improve ETS and DATS service.

In the morning, workshops were held to discuss ETS accessibility, security, and the new DATS registration process. Participants identified areas in which service could be improved and suggested ways to accomplish this. The afternoon sessions were mainly updates and addressed issues such as improving customer relations and customer research findings.

For more information about the conference, please contact:

Melissa Sargent
Edmonton Transit System
Phone: (780) 496-1090
Web site: www.TakeETS.com

or

Marilyn Hussey
Edmonton Transit System
Phone: (780) 496-5784
Web site: www.TakeETS.com

Mobility Training Programs in Calgary and Edmonton

Calgary Transit provides a free travel training program to individuals and groups with reduced mobility who seek greater transportation independence in their lives. Participants learn about route planning, boarding and exiting buses and the C-Train, safety and security, and recognizing stops and landmarks. A travel trainer plans the training schedule to match the needs of the individuals and groups participating in the program.

The City of Edmonton also provides a travel training program called Mobility Choices. This program teaches people with mobility and cognitive disabilities

the skills they need to make full use of the accessible public transit system. It also provides an overview of Edmonton Transit System's (ETS) complete range of accessible services, including Disabled Adult Transit Service (DATS). This program is free and enhances participants' freedom to travel according to their needs, thereby enhancing flexibility and independence in their lifestyles and making possible greater participation in the community.

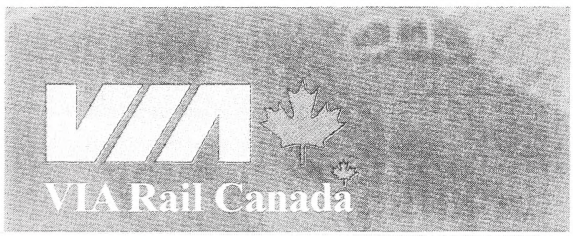
For more information, please contact:

Margaret Dorey
ETS Mobility Choices Trainer
Phone: (780) 496-3000

Web site: www.TakeETS.com

Gabe Bakos
Calgary Transit Travel Trainer
Phone: (403) 230-6682

Web site: www.calgarytransit.com



VIA Rail Accessibility

On March 27, the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) issued its decision on 46 alleged obstacles to the mobility of people with disabilities on VIA Rail Canada Inc.'s new "Renaissance" passenger cars. The decision is in response to a complaint from the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD).

In its decision, the CTA determined that there are 14 "undue" obstacles. Under the *Canada Transportation Act*, findings of "undue" obstacles can result in the CTA ordering transportation service providers to take corrective measures.

In its ruling, the CTA directed VIA Rail to "show cause" by answering nine specific questions about the rail cars. The CTA's direction to VIA Rail will enable the carrier to provide specific information with regard to structural, operational and economic implications of eliminating the obstacles before the CTA finalizes its decision. VIA Rail has 60 days from the ruling to respond to the CTA.

The CTA, which is a quasi-judicial tribunal, also decided:

- there are eight other obstacles on board the Renaissance cars that are not undue and, hence, VIA Rail will not have to take corrective action;

- the analysis of three obstacles is deferred until the CTA can consider the level of accessibility and accommodation provided in the cars' "accessible suites";

- 11 design features of concern to CCD do not constitute obstacles; and

- 10 alleged obstacles are, in fact, safety concerns which fall under Transport Canada's responsibility and hence, the CTA will refer them to Transport Canada for appropriate action.

VIA Rail intends to accommodate persons with disabilities who use wheelchairs on the Renaissance trains in several ways, including:

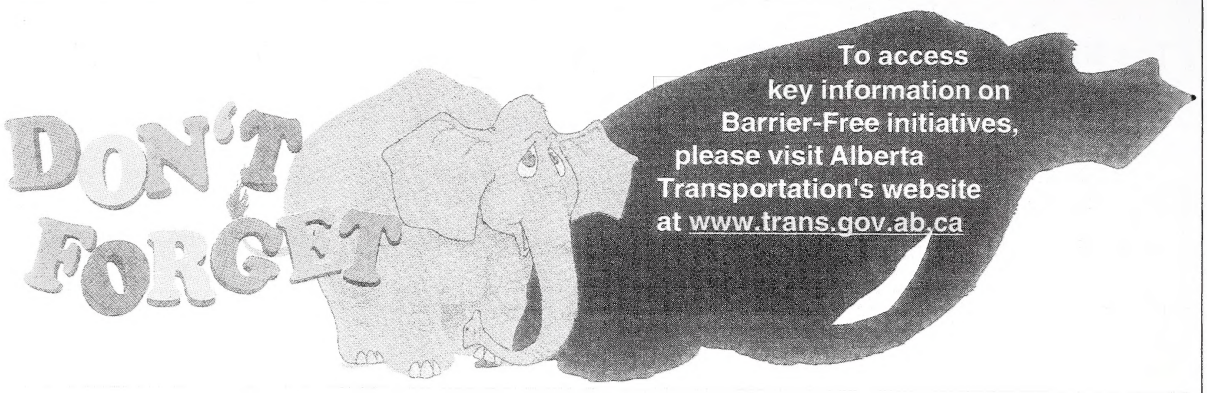
- an "accessible suite", composed of a sleeper unit and a washroom, located in each of the service cars;

- a wheelchair tie-down, located in each of the economy coach cars; or

- regular passenger seats in the coach cars, provided the person wishes to be transferred from his or her own wheelchair to a passenger seat.

For more information, please contact:

Canadian Transportation Agency
Phone: 1-888-222-2592
TTY: 1-800-669-5575
E-mail: cta.comment@cta-otc.gc.ca


DON'T FORGET
To access key information on Barrier-Free initiatives, please visit Alberta Transportation's website at www.trans.gov.ab.ca

Breaking Down the Barriers is published by Alberta Transportation to provide information about transportation issues of interest to people with disabilities and related organizations. It is distributed to municipalities, service providers, provincial organizations and consumer groups in Alberta. To be added to the distribution list, please phone (780) 427-7944 or dial 310-0000 for a toll free connection outside Edmonton. The views and opinions expressed in **Breaking Down the Barriers** do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board or Alberta Transportation. Any article in this publication may be reproduced, provided credit is given to the newsletter.

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